



MR. BACKUS'S SERMON

AT THE
ORDINATION

OF
MR. COOLEY.





†
27th
MINISTERS SERVING GOD IN THE GOSPEL
OF HIS SON.

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A
SERMON

DELIVERED AT
THE ORDINATION
OF

The Rev. Timothy Mather Cooley,

TO THE
PASTORAL CARE
OF THE
FIRST CHURCH IN GRANVILLE,

February 3, 1796.

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BY
CHARLES BACKUS, A.M.
PASTOR OF A CHURCH IN SOMERS.

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MONDAY

DELIVERED AT
THE ORATORY

BY

The Rev. Timothy Mather Coolidge

TO THE

PARISH OF ST. JOHN



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ORDINATION SERMON.

ROMANS I. 9.

FOR GOD HIS MY WITNESS, WHOM I SERVE WITH MY SPIRIT IN THE GOSPEL OF HIS SON, THAT WITHOUT CEASING I MAKE MENTION OF YOU ALWAYS IN MY PRAYERS.

IN the passage read for our present consideration, is summarily represented the manner in which the Gospel Ministry is to be fulfilled. The Apostle Paul, after returning thanks to God for all the saints at Rome, that their faith was spoken of throughout the whole world, appeals, in the text, to Omniscience, in proof of his sincerity in performing the work assigned him. Ordinary ministers of the gospel, or those raised up since the order of apostles ceased, may learn from the words before us, how they are to conduct, to approve themselves to God.

I. THE ministers of the gospel are required to serve God with or in their spirit, or the temper of their minds. "God is a spirit: and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth." None can do the will of God in his sight, unless they do it from the heart. In all acceptable service there must be first a willing mind. The heart is the seat of all moral exercises; and from it proceed

proceed holy or sinful actions, according to the quality of the fountain whence they issue.

THE apostle Paul was not governed by sinister motives, in entering on the work of propagating the religion of a crucified Saviour. He was in early life a Pharisee, and profited in the Jewish religion above many his equals in his own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of his fathers. But when it pleased God, who separated him from his mother's womb, and called him by his grace, to reveal his Son in him, that he might preach him among the heathen, immediately he *conferred not with flesh and blood*. He was willing to renounce all flattering worldly prospects, and to be publicly enrolled among the apostles; who were daily involved in peril, and were made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. The self-denial which is essential to the Christian character, is of the first importance to him who enters on the work of preaching a self-denying religion. Every minister will feel the force of this observation, who considers the nature of the gospel, and compares with it the spirit that reigns in the hearts of all the unsanctified, and is constantly showing itself in this apostate world.

To prophecy smooth things is pleasing to the flesh: If any one design to do this, he will not feel the need of girding up the loins of his mind; and will make it his study to shun every thing that crosses the reigning corruptions of the human heart. But whoever puts on the Christian armour will have no doubt that he has formidable enemies to contend with. He will not think that such defensive weapons had been provided, were there no perils before him. From whatever causes it happens that real Christians have not now many of the trials which they had in primitive times, we may be certain that their religion is the same, that wicked men are in heart at all times opposed to it, and that none can enter into the kingdom of God without enduring tribulation in some form or other. The world, the flesh, and the devil, never intermit their exertions to impede, to wound, and to destroy the cause of piety and virtue. Doth not every Christian constantly receive warning not to trust in himself, but in God who raiseth the dead? If Paul, with all his human and divine accomplishments, in a review of ministerial labours, was compelled to exclaim *who is sufficient for these things?* what self-diffidence and humility become Christian teachers raised up since the canon of scripture was closed? It highly concerns all who are invested with the sacred office, to be able to adopt the language of the primitive ministers, in their address to the churches—
 "For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that
 in

"in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward."

II. THE service required of Christian ministers forbids their being entangled with worldly concerns. Paul counsels Timothy, his son in the faith, and a young minister, to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, to be instrumental of introducing none but faithful men as teachers in the church, and to endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. That his mind might not be drawn aside from the duties of his function, he warns him against embarrassing himself with temporal pursuits, in the following words—
"No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier."*

IT is agreeable to both the old testament and the new, that the ministers of the gospel should be comfortably supplied with food and raiment by those to whom they minister. The apostle Paul speaks expressly in favour of this, in 1 Cor. ix. "Do ye not know, that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained, that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel." The mode in which ministers are to receive their temporal support, is discretionary. Different circumstances render different modes eligible: But that such support should be afforded in some way or other, is plainly commanded by the law of God, and is agreeable to the sense of the informed and the candid of every demonstration of Christians, who admit that ministers, as distinct from the common brethren, are, by divine appointment, to be continued in the church to the end of the world.

THE apostles, indeed, did not require support for themselves from the church, because of its existing state; being then in its infancy, and having to struggle with persecution. When the first Christian church was gathered at Jerusalem, as many of the brethren as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. This practice was adopted merely from the attending circumstances of the church at Jerusalem; but was not designed to authorise such practice among all churches, either then, or since. But we might with as much propriety urge throwing the whole

* 2 Tim. ii. 4.

whole property of the brotherhood into a common flock now, from the example of the first Christian church, as that ministers should now receive no maintenance from their people, from the example of the apostles.

PASTORS are directed to give themselves to *reading and meditation*, as a necessary part of their duty. The apostles, and other inspired teachers, had facts and doctrines sometimes revealed to them, which were to compose the matter of their discourses, as immediately from God, as if he should this moment communicate to us here assembled, what is transacting on that part of the globe which is directly opposite to the spot where we now are. No uninspired man will, in his sober senses, pretend to such intercourse with the Deity. All pious men, in every age of the church, have had *assistance* from the spirit of God. They have been the subjects of his sanctifying influences, and have been guided into every truth necessary for their salvation; but *inspiration*, or the knowledge of facts immediately communicated to the mind by the Most High, has not been common to his people. We see no need of inspiration since the scriptures were completed. If any one lay claim to it, we have a right to demand that he support it by working miracles, as did the inspired men of old; and if he fail of giving such proof, we are bound to treat him as an impostor. Are not all believers, whether in public or private stations, acquainted with the aids of the divine spirit in their prayers, in their meditations, and in other duties? Who find such assistance most? either they who are most abundant in studying the book of God with meekness, or they who are less attentive to serious meditation? It becometh us daily to look to the Father of Lights, that we may rightly apprehend what is revealed, and feel the power of it on our hearts; but we need nothing added to the volume of inspiration. The Christian minister must read the scriptures much, and with close attention, to become a scribe instructed unto the kingdom of heaven; like unto a man that is an householder, who bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old. Preachers who neglect the improvement of their own minds, and trust wholly to the invention or warmth of the moment, either pour forth crude and indigested matter, or are confined within a small circle, or have nothing in the present discourse different from the last, except the text.

THE design of the foregoing observations is, to press the importance of *study* on those who minister in holy things; and that they should not be diverted from that and other duties belonging to their office, by attending to worldly concerns. The duty and interest of their people require that they prevent, as much as possible, their

their being diverted from their main business, by perplexing cares about the means of support.

THE minister who voluntarily plunges in secular concerns; is highly criminal. His mind will be barren—his discourses will be uninstruative—his heart will be cold—his daily communication will favour much of the spirit of the world—and there is little reason to hope that his hearers will receive benefit from him.

THE work of the ministry is a great and arduous work; and is abundantly sufficient to employ the life of any man. The apostle Paul found ample room to occupy his time and talents, in the propagation and defence of the gospel. What then shall we think of those teachers, who are not furnished with knowledge in some of the ways he was, and are destitute of his accomplishments in other respects, who make the ministry an occasional business? and permit cares foreign to their profession to swallow up their minds?

III. THE minister who *serveth God in the gospel of his Son*, will preach the doctrines it contains.

WE do not affirm that any mere man is perfectly clear from error; in matters of comparatively small importance the true Christian may never be rectified in the present life. The leading doctrines of revelation will be held up by all who are commissioned by the head of the church, to call sinners to repentance and to build up saints in holiness.

IN beseeching sinners to be reconciled to God, it is necessary to set his true character before their minds. To spend our strength in labouring to bring men to reconciliation with an imaginary Deity, will be worse than labouring in vain; it tends to settle them down in delusion, and carry them at a greater distance than ever from the kingdom of God. No persons are more strongly barred against conviction, than those who are confidently crying Peace, Peace, to themselves, while they are strangers to the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The existence of God is deducible from the light of nature, and pagans are bound to glorify him; agreeable to the reasonings of the apostle in the context. But to know God as he is reconciling the world unto himself, we must look to the plan of grace revealed in the gospel. If we impartially examine the holy scriptures, we shall behold in the Divine mind infinite knowledge and power united with infinite love. The various modifications of the love of God as Lawgiver and Redeemer, are suited to impress the human mind with its duty, and to open a door of hope. Our moral disorder must be well understood, to discover the nature and necessity of gospel grace. Christ did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. He came to seek and to save

save that which was lost. They who have committed no fault need no pardon. If mankind do not deserve the wrath of God; and might not universally have been left to perish in their sins, like the apostate angels, without any impeachment of the divine justice, there can be no *grace* in the salvation of any of the race of Adam.

NATURAL religion points out no way in which sinners can be restored to the favour of God. The law we have transgressed cannot be overthrown or abated; and it requires perfect obedience. No creature, though without sin, could yield more obedience at any moment than the law demands: hence, transgressors have nothing to look for, on the footing of law, but ruin. The more just conceptions sinners have of the law of God, the greater reason have they to fear destruction, so long as they know nothing of the mediatorial interposition of the Son of God. By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in the sight of God; for by the law is the knowledge of sin. We can be delivered from a state of condemnation only through Jesus Christ: There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. The expiatory sacrifice made by his sufferings and death, hath laid a foundation for the hope of pardon and eternal life. According to the covenant of grace, those who receive Christ with all their hearts, are justified in the sight of God. Romans iii. 24—26: "Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness; that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."

NONE will come to Christ for life, until first convinced of their sin; that in them naturally dwelleth no good thing, and that divine justice would shine bright in their everlasting punishment. To learn our true character, the law of God must be brought home to our hearts in its holy nature and extent. Sinners must be slain by the law or they will never relish the gospel. The apostle saith of himself, "For I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died."* He was led to approve of the law as holy, just, and good, and to delight in it after the inward man. Such views of the law prepare the way of the Lord in the heart, and lead to glory in the cross of Christ. The plan of divine grace is humbling to the pride of man, and forbids glorying in the flesh. It is highly dangerous to flatter sinners with their imaginary good desires and doings, whilst they are ignorant of God's righteousness, and are going about to establish their own. The evangelical preacher will hold up depraved human nature in its true deformity, and inculcate the necessity of the new birth; to subdue the will, and to bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

WHEN

* Rom. iii. 9.

WHEN, by the influences of the Holy Spirit, the gospel is rendered effectual to salvation, true peace is introduced to the soul, and it rejoiceth in hope of the glory of God. All the privileges of adoption are experienced by believers, and they are kept under the discipline which is training them up for heaven. Concerning them Christ declares, in John xth, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."

THE gospel forbids continuing in sin that grace may abound. All who feel the transforming influence of the gospel upon their hearts, will crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts. They will reckon themselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ their Lord. Neither will they yield their members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin; but will yield themselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and their members as instruments of righteousness unto God. Being made free from sin, and become servants to God, they have their fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. Nothing is more plain, both from scripture and experience, than that the spirit which the gospel breathes, is a spirit of holiness, and leads to a life of conformity to the divine commands. Sinless perfection has never been found in any believer in the present life. This is not consistent with the warfare in which all good men are involved, so long as they are in the body—They have, till death finishes their course, a law in their members warring against the law of their mind. But all who are united to the Son of God by faith, are under the governing influence of his holy religion; and instead of resting in past attainments, are reaching forth unto those things which are before, and pressing towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

THE foregoing hints may suffice, briefly to point out some of the leading things implied in preaching the gospel. Every minister, who copies after the apostolic pattern, will determine not to know any thing among those with whom he labours, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

IV. CHRISTIAN ministers in doing the duty assigned them, must stand up in defence of the gospel. They are unworthy of their trust, if they do not exert themselves to maintain the truth and inspiration of the scriptures, when those writings are represented as a cunningly devised fable. They may not be silent when the doctrines taught in the oracles of God are denied, or perverted. The exhortation to "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints," falls with peculiar weight on those who are *set for the defence of the gospel*.

It argues neither fortitude nor wisdom to raise up an old heresy from its grave, and to undertake to refute it, when no one appears

to advocate it, or to be in danger of catching its contagion. The error and wickedness *of the day*, are the enemies to be encountered. When we look back on the lives of wise and pious men, we shall find them standing for the truths opposed in *their* time, and attempting to stem the torrent of wickedness, which *then* threatened the destruction of individuals or of society. Though the depraved heart of man is always essentially the same, its expressions are very various; according to the different circumstances under which persons are placed, their degree of information, and the existing cast of the public mind. It would be easy to illustrate this observation by looking no further than our own country, and comparing together the different periods of our short history.

ACCORDING to the way of thinking which obtains with many, who have access to the Book of God, it can be of no importance what creed we adopt. If no other test be necessary to constitute soundness of faith, than one's own sincerity in what he happens to fix upon, it is of no importance to contend for or against any religious system. We may go further, and observe, that on this principle, it is wrong to represent the Deity as possessed of any one character, as distinguished from every other, or as loving or abhorring any thing as truth or falsehood. Some are so unhinged in their faith, as to be willing to go this length, to free themselves from all uneasy thoughts about a future state of retribution. If there be no fixed standard of truth or holiness in the universe, it is folly to talk of God as a moral Governor, or of his being a proper object of reverence or trust. To refute this and many other delusions, nothing more is necessary or eligible than fairly to place the subject before the mind, and call up its attention to the glaring absurdity.

If we are never to warn against imbibing sentiments of any kind, why did Christ condemn the scribes of old for *teaching for doctrines the commandments of men*. And why were the pens of the apostles so much employed in confuting the errors which sprung up among the churches? John, in his second epistle, was moved by the Holy Ghost to declare, "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God; he that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God-speed: For he that biddeth him God-speed is partaker of his evil deeds."

THE world lieth in wickedness; and is at all times engaged to support itself by opinions which correspond with its corrupt taste. Against these the man of God is bound to lift up his warning voice: Especially is he commanded to be vigilant and courageous when the enemy cometh in like a flood.

V. MINISTERS

V. MINISTERS must endure afflictions with patience, to serve God with their spirit in the gospel of his Son. It is peculiarly incumbent on them to endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. When primitive ministers addressed themselves to the churches, they addressed them as *their brethren and companions in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.*

MINISTERS may do as much to honour religion, and as fully subserve its interest, by patient suffering as by active service. The most distinguished instruments in propagating divine truth, have been the subjects of uncommon trials. To them it has been allotted to pass through the furnace; to brighten their characters, and to render them eminently useful in the church of God.

WHAT cause have we in the ministry at the present day, to be ashamed for being ready to sink under our troubles, when they fall so vastly short of what the apostles endured? They spake of themselves "as sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things."

VI. THE ministers of the gospel must be abundant in the duty of prayer, to be faithful in fulfilling their trust. The apostle constantly bore his beloved brethren on his heart at the throne of grace.—To them he was able to declare, as in the text, that *without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers.*

PRAYER is essential to the Christian character, and is the grand instituted medium of maintaining intercourse with the Father of lights, and the God of grace. All the eminent servants of Christ have been eminent for the constancy and fervour of their devotions. Herein they have imitated their Lord and Master, who, when he abode in the flesh, spent much of his time in prayer. Every teacher sent of God, will daily look up to him for mercy, in behalf of himself and others. He will pray that he might be guided into all truth, be kept from temptation, and, that by manifestation of the truth, he might commend himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God. He will pray for the overthrow of the kingdom of darkness, and for the advancement of the kingdom of the Redeemer. His supplications will be accompanied with thanksgiving to God; for past displays of his grace, for the promises of good things to come, and the honour that will redound to his great name in the final issue of things. Such was the devout frame of the apostles, that prisons were turned into houses of prayer and praise. Ministers who love to pray, will be abundant in the duty. To them the cause in which they are engaged will appear of infinite worth, the prevalence of pure religion in any place will be matter of triumph, they will not doubt the ability and truth of a covenant-keeping God, and will count nothing dear to themselves that they may finish their course with joy.

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THE discourse will be concluded with addresses suited to the present occasion.

THE attention of the Pastor elect, is particularly called to the duties of the evangelical ministry.

DEAR SIR,

YOU are called to serve God in the gospel of his Son. I hope that you have satisfying evidence that you are entering into this service with your spirit, or with your whole heart. Renew the dedication of yourself to God, in the breathings of your soul, whilst you are passing through the solemn consecration to the work of the gospel ministry. This day is a day of high importance—it will draw after it consequences of vast magnitude to you, and to this people. You cannot perform your ordination vows, if you confer with flesh and blood. You must wound the feelings of the proud heart, if you preach the self-denying doctrines of the cross; and must engage in a conflict with a wicked world, to adopt the means which God hath instituted for its reformation. Let the addresses you make to the consciences of men, be calculated to convince them that you are a friend to their highest interest; and that you have no desire to wound only for to heal, or to lead sinners to apply to the balm in Gilead, for a cure of the moral disorder which threatens their everlasting ruin. The fewer avocations you have from the work of the ministry, and the more closely you pursue it, the more you will improve in all the accomplishments which give worth, respectability, and influence to the Christian Pastor. “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” Become deeply acquainted with the human character in its apostate state, lay it open in your preaching, and point sinners to Christ, as the way, the truth, and the life. It will be infinitely better to be charged with illiberality by the enemies of truth, than to be a blind leader of the blind. Be not, at any time, ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth.

As you enter on public life in a day of science and free enquiry, it must appear to you of no small importance to be able to give such reasons of your hope, as may silence, if they do not convince gain-sayers. “In meekness instruct those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.” Accommodate your discourses to the state of your congregation, and to the complection of the times through which you may pass. This will prove the best method to secure the attention of your hearers, and bids fairest to be useful to them.

BORN and educated in this place, you will need the greater vigilance, that no man have just occasion to despise thy youth. Magnify
your

your office, Dear Brother, and you will command the esteem of persons of all ages. "Rebuke not an elder, but entreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren; the elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity." After receiving such distinguished marks of the affection of your own people, you must feel yourself under peculiar and high obligations to labour for their everlasting welfare. In beholding your wife conduct, "Thy father and thy mother shall be glad, and she that bare thee shall rejoice." While you treat your parents with filial respect, and those of the same descent with you, with fraternal tenderness, remember that you are charged before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, to observe the things which belong to your office, without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.

UNDER the troubles which will overtake you, take the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. If you endure as seeing him who is invisible, you will grow in grace, be the more useful in the church, and your affliction will work for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Live near to God at all times. Be a man of prayer. Pray without ceasing for the people of your charge, according to their characters, and circumstances in life. Pour out your heart to God in fervent supplications, for direction in duty, for grace to withstand temptations, and that you may be succeeded in advancing the cause of the Redeemer. God grant his blessing upon your ministry; may you long continue in the good work, and at last receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

THE discourse is next addressed to the Church and Congregation in this place.

BRETHREN AND FRIENDS,

WE rejoice with you, that after the lapse of many years since you enjoyed a settled ministry, the day is again come for one to be set over you in the Lord. God, who hath the hearts of all men in his hand, hath led you to agree, with singular unanimity, in one of your own sons, to take you by the hand, and guide you in the way of life. From the exertions you have made for the support of the ministry, you have evidenced a strong desire to have it perpetuated in this place. We hope that your expectations will not be disappointed, in the man on whom your eyes are now placed as your pastor. Long may he live in your hearts, and may you prove his joy and crown in the day of the Lord Jesus.

WHEN he cometh to you in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ, receive him, or you will be guilty of rejecting the Son of God. Be desirous to hear the plain, heart-searching truths of Christianity; and receive them in love. Let none take offence

at the doctrines of grace, or lay the preacher under temptations to prophecy smooth things. Will any be so hardened in sin, as to choose rather to endanger their salvation, than to have their false hopes, and their wickedness exposed and condemned? If governed by meekness, the word of God will be sweet unto your taste; and you will perceive a growing attachment to one who faithfully watches for your souls. The consciences of the wicked tell them, that the minister acts in a manner unworthy of his station, if he withhold warning and reproof. The clamours which bad characters sometimes raise to shut the mouth of the man of God, are a wretched subterfuge; and proclaim the approaching confusion and horror of the finally impenitent, when their consciences shall be awakened never more to sleep. Remembering that your minister is a man of like passions, you will throw the mantle of charity over his infirmities.

Though he received his birth in this place, and has passed most of his youth among you, we trust that you will not forget, that if he faithfully labour in word and doctrine, he is to be accounted worthy of double honour. Speak words of comfort to him when under trials, and by offices of friendship endeavour to lessen his sufferings. Strive together with him in your prayers to God for him. *Brethren pray for us*, was the request of the apostle Paul to primitive Christians. Pray that utterance may be given unto him, that he may open his mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, that abundant success may attend the word preached here; that the religion of the holy Saviour may be promulgated among all nations; and that the kingdoms of this world, may become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ. Stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.

To this whole assembly let me say, in the words of Christ—"This is the work of God that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." Murmur not at the gospel; lest ye be given up to wonder, and perish. Neglect the great salvation no longer. God grants your repentance unto life. Let those who have received Christ, walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called. Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.

When he comes to you, receive him, and receive him in love. Christian, and receive him in love.

